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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses conditions that cause middle management personnel to join unions, describes how school boards may alleviate these conditions, presents precedents being established to legitimize the formation of separate bargaining units for administrators, and discusses the management team as an alternative for management bargaining units. The author suggests that to make teams effective, top level administrators should (1) pay attention to the environmental factor -- the physical quarters in which the team works; (2) strive to generate job excitement; (3) make performance evaluation more effective; and (4) consider the use of discipline. The speech also discusses future developments in the field of collective negotiations for school personnel. (JF)

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SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: ADMINISTRATOR UNION OR MANAGEMENT TEAM?

By George B. Redfern

The surest way to put most school administrators into orbit in this country is to advocate unions for school managers. This being true, the part of prudence is to steer clear of advocating any form of adversary bargaining for administrators and to stoutly opt for the management team concept. This would be likely to assure more enthusiastic acceptance and, maybe, more generous applause. So, it's tempting to "play it cool," make a passionate plea for the team approach, and not "rock the boat." Doing so, however, risks being accused of being a "chicken administrator" and dodges the burden of this assignment. Even more serious, perhaps, is the fact that, unless this proposition is examined critically, my colleagues will be denied the opportunity to take issue with my comments or react to my viewpoints. So, here goes.

Some Basic Considerations:

It is essential to consider at the outset some of the reasons why school administrators may be tempted to entertain an idea of either joining a union or refraining from doing so.

Erosion of the "right of access." Bureaucratic organizations often create distances between various layers of administrators. Large school systems with complicated organizational structures, especially, contribute to this feeling of "loss of access." Size of system may not be the crucial factor, however. A sense

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of frustration can result when administrators feel cut off from top-level decision-making even in smaller, relatively uncomplicated school systems. When this occurs the management team concept can be more rhetoric than reality.

Collective bargaining between boards of education, top administrators, and teachers has accentuated this "left out" feeling on the part of middle managers whether at the local school level or in the central office. Middle managers have had a hard time deciding what their roles should be in this process, even though board members and superintendents are quite positive what their positions are and should continue to be. As a knowledgeable top-level administrator recently put it in a meeting I attended, "Damn it, middle managers--assistant principal on up--are management. And what's more important, management can't bargain against itself." This is a popular and widespread view. Thus it follows, so the argument goes, if middle managers are part of management in board-superintendent-teacher negotiations, it is utterly ridiculous to think that they could or should join a union or an association to bargain with their bosses. Management is an entity and it is totally incongruous to have one managerial component bargaining against another component.

Oratory is irrelevant, however, if indeed middle managers have or feel they have lost the "right of access," of being genuinely and deeply involved in decision-making as a part of the management team.

Working conditions for principals--and to some degree for

other middle-level administrators and supervisors--have changed drastically during the sixties. In many respects one of the hottest spots in school administration today is the principalship. Men and women in these sensitive, very demanding positions are under a great variety of pressures. The student "revolution," drug abuse, changing mores in dress, manners, and behavior, teacher militancy, parent demands, community discontent, breakdowns in discipline, changing curriculum and instructional imperatives, and daily crisis-management are some of the problems that make the lives of these leaders turbulent and tension-laden. These administrative and supervisory people on the daily firing-line can feel quite isolated and alone unless they are convinced that top-level management is keenly aware of the pressures they are experiencing, is providing supportive assistance, and, most of all, is accessible when help is urgently needed. I have a suspicion that one of the reasons middle managers are apprehensive about who's looking out for their interests is that they really don't feel that they are truly part of the management team. In other words, they want more than platitudes about team management. They want delivered performance. Incidentally, it might be a good idea for the superintendent of schools to install a "hotline" between his office and the offices of his front-line middle managers so that instant communication is available when crises arise and direct consultation is direly needed.

So, as far as basic factors are concerned, I suggest that the "right of access" must really exist and be operationally

effective if middle managers can be expected to truly feel a part of the management team.

Secondly, a hard look has to be taken at the collective bargaining process not only for teachers but for middle managers, as well. It is hardly enough merely to admonish principals and central office personnel to reject all thoughts of identification with unions or associations if they honestly have misgivings about the viability of their own professional welfare and career development. The best insurance policy against their joining an employee organization is to make such action unnecessary.

The third basic consideration is to make sensitivity to the working conditions under which middle managers perform a high priority of top management and to fortify these valuable leaders with a sense of high-level support and reinforcement.

So much for these basic considerations.

Legal precedents are being established to legitimate the formation of separate bargaining units for administrators.

In May, 1970, the Michigan Court of Appeals upheld a decision of the Michigan Labor Mediation Board (MLMB) finding that supervisory personnel are public employees within the meaning of the state's Public Employment Relations Act and that a unit of supervisory personnel employed by the Hillsdale Community Schools was appropriate for collective bargaining purposes.

Hillsdale Community Schools Principal and Supervisory

Association had sought to hold an election to form a unit of high school, junior high school, and elementary school principals, curriculum coordinator, cooperative reading coordinator, ESEA coordinator, cooperative education coordinator, head librarian, and physical education director. The school system objected (in part) on the grounds that supervisors and executives had no collective bargaining rights under the state's Public Employment Relations Act. The MLMB denied the school system's petition and the Michigan Court of Appeals sustained MLMB.

In 1970 in New York an independent arbitrator ruled appropriate, under the Taylor Law, a bargaining unit composed of 30 assistant superintendents, administrative directors, supervising directors, coordinators, and other top administrative personnel of the Rochester Public Schools. Such a unit was subsequently organized and was certified as the bargaining representative for these middle managers.

Even in higher education precedents are being established to justify the formation of management units for bargaining purposes. Negotiation Research Digest of January 1970 reported that the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission had ruled that separate collective bargaining units should represent the academic and nonacademic professional employees of Boston State College. One unit was to include teaching faculty and professional personnel holding titles of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, and associate dean, plus 10-month librarians holding academic rank.

A second unit was to include professional personnel not

holding academic rank consisting of state college librarian, assistant librarian-cataloguer, library reference assistant, senior library assistant bursar, assistant or associate registrar, associate admissions director, chief accountant, superintendent of buildings and grounds, college counselor, financial aid director, computer programmer, nurse, and laboratory technicians with bachelor's degrees.

Thus, there is precedent for the formation of bargaining units for administrators and supervisors. Later, I shall make some observations about the likelihood of the spread of these developments. Now, for some comments regarding the management team as an alternative to bargaining units for managers.

It is generally agreed that running a school system--either large or small--is a team operation. In fact, the superintendency comprises a corps of specialists and is no longer the length and shadow of a single individual. David E. Lilienthal put this in perspective in Management: A Humanist Art, published five years ago, in which he said:

> [M]anagement does not really exist. It is a word, an idea...management is an abstraction. But managers exist. And managers are not abstractions, they are men, they are human beings....

So, the administrative team must be viewed as a collective body made up of individuals each of whom has a unique contribution to make, a particular function to perform to, as Lilienthal says,

> ...lead and move and bring out the latent capabilities --and dreams--of other human beings.

Sometimes, however, there is more rhetoric than reality regarding the administrative team. Merely professing commitment to the

team approach, without actually practicing collaborative administration, sells the concept short.

It is important to nurture and motivate the growth and development of the administrative team. There are many approaches to the motivation of the team. The following elements of a deliberate development program may be useful:

1. Pay attention to the environmental factor. The physical quarters in which team members work are important. A superintendent who recently was able to move his administrative and supervisory staff into a new administration building reported that the move made a big difference in the morale and attitudes of the staff. Pride and productivity were multiplied. Environment--psychological and physical--can be critical to the success of the administrative team. In the words of Arch Patton, widely known and recognized authority in the field of executive compensation, administration, and executive manpower management, environment may be considered as

> ...the sum total of all the factors that make up an organization's way of life. But it often becomes hard to recognize the environmental forest because it is made up of so many administrative trees.*

2. Strive to generate job excitement. Excitement within the administrative team cannot be created solely by action from the top. The critical spark that ignites excitement must be provided by leadership that sets demanding goals and is able to obtain belief in and support for them. The superintendent

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* From: The Arts of Top Management, A McKinsey Anthology, p. 194.

must personally spearhead the drive toward demanding goals. It is more exciting to be associated with an organization that pursues challenging objectives than with one that pays less attention to this aspect of management development.

3. Make performance evaluation more effective. Team members who are strongly achievement-oriented need to have feedback on their own performance. Behavioral scientists tell us that substantial improvement in performance may be expected from the administrator who

- knows where and to what degree his performance is strong or weak,
- is aware of what he can and should do to strengthen his performance,
- has the capacity and the desire to make qualitative and quantitative changes himself,
- is encouraged to pursue a planned program of improvement.

4. Don't overlook the potentialities of discipline. Many behavioral scientists argue that job satisfaction is as essential a motivator as money. Some go so far as to conclude that, if you turn a person free from constraints, job satisfaction will mount and productivity will rise. This is not necessarily so. Organizational goals may not be embraced by the emancipated administrator. There is no reason to suppose that everyone will do his best to attain organizational goals if only they are free to do so on their own.

There is another important component to be considered, namely, an organization "game plan" and roles for team members to play in

the achievement of team goals. There is some evidence to support the proposition that it is less rewarding to work for an overly permissive boss than for one who is more demanding in the sense that:

- a sense of direction is more evident,
- expectations are more clearly defined,
- standards are more rigorous, and
- performance is more persistently evaluated.

Discipline embraces the will to succeed and involves team effort toward the attainment of cooperatively developed work goals and a sound assessment of each team member's contribution to those objectives.

What lies ahead?

1. More negotiation laws. Fifty-eight percent or 29 of the states have enacted statutes governing negotiation procedures either for public employees including public school personnel or for the latter separately.

In the next five years this figure will approach seventy-five percent or 38 states.

2. Principals definitely management. A favorite academic exercise has been to debate the question of whether principals should be identified as management in the negotiation process. Despite ambivalence on the part of many principals, especially at the elementary school level, this will cease to be a debatable matter in the next five years (except in a decreasing number of states where negotiation is still an informal meet-and-confer process). Principals and other administrators and supervisors

will be declared management because the nature of their duties and responsibilities identifies them as managers. The "community of interest" doctrine will prevail as state negotiation agencies rule on this question.

3. Separate bargaining units for middle managers. Large school systems where the number of middle managers is substantial will recognize administrative and supervisory units for bargaining purposes. Boards of education will resist this trend and superintendents will wish that they might be spared being caught in the crossfire of board resistance and middle-manager persistence. The decision will be made by employee-relations governing bodies at the state level, however.

4. Small school systems will strengthen "meet and confer" procedures for middle managers. Where numbers are too small to make bilateral, formalized bargaining feasible, middle managers will insist on more structured meet-and-confer procedures to gain their professional and welfare goals.

5. Backup from state and national principals' organizations. Being the most numerous group in the middle management component, principals will exert the strongest influence in guiding the negotiation process. State and national associations will provide backup support and inservice resources. This will not put NASSP, NAESP, and their counterparts in the states in a conflict relationships with AASA and state administrators' groups. Collective negotiation for middle managers will become recognized as a legitimate operational activity. Time and

experience will make it a positive rather than a negative process.

6. No alienation between top and middle managers. The temptation to let collective negotiation alienate top and middle managers will be resisted by both parties. Adversary actions across the bargaining table will not be carried over into other operational relationships. Postures assumed in negotiation will be relevant for that operation in and of itself. There is no reason to believe that middle managers cannot or will not perform their regular duties and responsibilities with full fidelity and faithfulness despite the strains that may be generated during the negotiation period. Professional loyalty and dedication need not become casualties of the negotiation process.

7. Collaboration among all management organizations. There is a strong probability that all groups in the management component will join together in a collaborative relationship--perhaps in a confederation of managers. This will be at all levels--national, state, and local. While joining together because of a strong community of interests, superintendents, principals, supervisors, administrators, administrative and supervisory specialists will retain their identities with their primary groups. Collective negotiation need not and should not invalidate overall collaborative relationships and work relationships.

So much for prognostications. Those that I have omitted, you may add. Should some or all come to pass, how will this affect the operations of the administrative team?

Working relationships will be clarified. Access to the

determination of administrative policies and procedures is a right that should be broadly shared. The privilege of collective participation carries with it the obligation to share the responsibilities that result from shared decisions. It will be increasingly difficult for middle managers to second guess top management if they share the responsibility for decisions made at the bargaining table.

Collective negotiation is a method of decision-making, not a substitute for it. Good faith bargaining does not require capitulation. The prerogatives of top management are lost only if given away. The bargaining process assumes that requests or demands will exceed expectations. Top administrators will be obliged to develop the expertise required to manage collective negotiation so that there is gaining as well as giving at the table. Once this is attained, bargaining can be taken in stride.

For a considerable period of time I have been an advocate of the philosophy of leadership propounded by the late Douglas McGregor. In his 1966 book Leadership and Motivation he says, among many things:

> Management by direction and control--whether implemented with the hard, the soft, or the firm but fair approach--fails under today's conditions to provide effective motivation of human effort toward organizational objectives. It fails because direction and control are useless methods of motivating people whose physiological and safety needs are reasonably satisfied and whose social, egoistic, and self-fulfillment needs are predominant.

Administrator union or management team? The answer lies, I feel, in the hands of top administration and boards of education

where the option is still an open one. Make the management team a viable concept. In short, make it work. That's the best insurance policy against management unions. Failure to do so almost certainly hastens their coming.

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